

Date: 7/14/20

Dear East Hartford Community,

In less than two months, EPHS will be facing a new challenge as we begin to re-open schools. Our new challenge will require the support and commitment from our school staff and families. We will work together to ensure all students are safe and have the educational opportunity that best meets their needs. We expect to open schools on August 26, 2020.

Following up the Superintendent's last communication on June 26, 2020, we wanted to reconnect to share a **first draft** of the [EHPS Fall 2020 Re-Opening Plan](#) that our district and school leaders have been working on for the past two weeks following the release of the state plan. As you review this lengthy high-level communication and the linked comprehensive plan, please know that we have crafted these documents to **align with the requirements of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) ReOpening Plan** (Released 6/29/20) and to match the projected status for public health measures. As we continue to follow through on the principles of the EHPS ReOpening Process (Safe, Incremental, Adaptive), this plan represents a next step towards safely returning our EHPS community to normal.

The CSDE ReOpening Plan has been designed around six guiding principles:

1. Safeguarding the health and safety of students and staff;
2. Allowing all students the opportunity to return to school full time starting in the fall;
3. Monitoring the school, students, and staff and, when necessary, potentially canceling classes in the future to appropriately contain COVID-19 spread;
4. Emphasizing equity, access, and support to the students and communities that are emerging from this historic disruption;
5. Fostering strong two-way communication with partners such as families, educators, and staff; and
6. Factoring into decisions about reopening the challenges to the physical safety, social emotional well-being, and the mental health needs of our students when they are not in school.

Accordingly, EPHS has adopted these principles and tailored a plan that matches the voices of students, parents, faculty and administration as well as the limitations of our school district. While we believe our current draft is comprehensive, detailed and full of careful thinking, we are eager to share this plan with you and listen to your feedback. As we all work together to support our students and our community, we understand the enormous challenge that lies ahead of returning from a pandemic. In East Hartford, we also recognize the unbridled power of a community that continues to RISE together to meet this challenge and to support our future. We thank you in advance for your continued participation and support.

Key Elements of the EHPS Fall 2020 ReOpening Plan:

- *Plan Description:* Designed to return all students (PK-12) for full-time instruction on August 26, 2020, the EHPS ReOpening Plan is built on current public health forecasts that safely allow for this next step. Supported by intensive mitigation strategies (as detailed in the linked EHPS ReOpening Plan), specific monitoring, containment and school reduction and cancellation plans, this plan provides the highest level of educational access for East Hartford students.

- *Distance Learning Plan (DLP) Option:* Recognizing that some students and families may not be ready to return to school, the EHPS ReOpening Plan provides a learn from home option. Parents who select this option recognize that this decision will necessitate a commitment through the second semester, (January 26, 2021) to this learning model due to necessary staffing obligations and additional public health concerns around cohorting obligations. The DLP model will include a blend of experiences in which students are provided with live instruction and are also given time to work on assignments at their own pace. In this model, both the educators and the students will be expected to adhere to specific structures, times and routines.
- *Option Selection Requirement:* Recognizing that families will need to make a choice between “In School” and “Distance Learning,” ALL FAMILIES are required to complete the linked survey prior to 7/24/20 to allow EHPS to design and fill a staffing profile to meet these obligations. The survey link can be found by simply clicking the link embedded in this document ([EHPS ReOpening Survey for Parents](#)).
- *Face Covering/Mask Requirement:* As a vital component of protecting public health, all students and staff will be required to wear a mask that covers their nose and mouth throughout the school day. While EHPS encourages students and staff to wear ones that best meet their personal preference and comfort, the district will provide face coverings to any student or staff member who does not have one. During instruction, an educator is permitted to remove the mask, but should make every attempt to maintain 6 feet of distance from students and colleagues. If students or educators are eating, drinking, engaged in physical activity, or outside, they will be permitted to remove their masks but encouraged to maintain 6 feet of distancing. Masks will not be required for anyone who has a medical reason making it unsafe to wear a face covering, or who has trouble breathing or who is otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance, per CDC guidance. To protect public health, students who refuse or repeatedly exhibit non-compliant behavior will be required to participate in the DLP.
- *Containment and Closure Plans:* EHPS has provided several protocols regarding containment and closure that have been linked in the comprehensive plan. While we currently await further guidance from the CSDE regarding containment and closure plans predicated on assessing public health conditions and community transmission, these protocols will be used to guide decision making at this time. All district schools will identify “isolation rooms” where students exhibiting COVID- like symptoms (fever, dry cough, shortness of breath) will be held for dismissal to parents.
- *Reporting Illnesses/Monitoring Personal Health Conditions Prior to Attendance:* The EHPS ReOpening Plan requires students and staff to inform the school if they are sick with COVID-19 related symptoms and stay home, particularly if they had a known contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have also had contact with the school population. Prior to coming to school, students and staff must perform a health self-assessment to identify fever and other possible COVID-19 symptoms. If students or staff have any of these symptoms, they must stay home and notify the school for the reason of absence.
- *Cohorting Strategy:* The EHPS ReOpening plan includes a cohorting strategy (students will remain in a similar group throughout the day as appropriate and feasible) that varies out of necessity across grade levels. Students at the elementary level will be designated in grade level cohorts with interactions in specials, PE/Health and in the cafeteria. Students at the middle level will function in team level cohorts. Based on the complexity of scheduling at the high school level, cohorting will be implemented as feasible.

- *Social Distancing:* The EHPS ReOpening Plan puts a high priority on social distancing within school. When possible, student desks will be arranged to maximize social distancing as well as space between the students and instructors. In addition, schools will be using alternative spaces to allow for additional spacing and will be reviewing internal traffic patterns to make social distancing easier for students. It should be noted that pre-COVID, all EHPS schools operated at full capacity. As such, maintaining and creating additional spacing will continue to be an ongoing challenge.
- *Personal Hygiene/Cleaning/Sanitizing Efforts:* The EHPS ReOpening Plan puts a heavy emphasis on supporting students and staff to maintain high standards of personal hygiene. As such, specific time and effort will be spent on educating students regarding the importance of frequent handwashing and use of hand sanitizer, respiratory and cough etiquette. In addition, the Plan includes a prioritized effort around sanitizing/disinfecting high touch surfaces throughout the school day to promote public health.
- *Transportation:* Based on current forecasts for public health data, the EHPS ReOpening Plan, in alignment to State requirements, will operate at full capacity. EHPS will be working with transportation providers to attempt to address large group stops as able. Students will be required to load the bus from the back row first to the front and wear face coverings for the duration of their time on the bus. Students who do not wear masks on the bus will be required to participate in the DLP.

We realize that this a wealth of information that will certainly stimulate ideas, questions and concerns. As we work to finalize this draft and move into the next incremental phase of the process, “*preparation,*” we ask that you carefully review this draft and send any questions or comments to our ReOpening Task Force at (ReOpenEHPS@Easthartford.org). In addition, we have scheduled the following virtual Town Hall to provide our parents and guardians an opportunity to provide feedback and respond. Please consider attending an event that works for your schedule:

EHPS Community Group	Date	Time	Zoom Link
Parents/Guardians	7/16	1:00-2:00 pm	https://zoom.us/j/91543220411 Phone - Dial +1 929 205 6099 ID 915 4322 0411
Parents/Guardians	7/16	6:30-7:30 pm	https://zoom.us/j/98341043654 Phone – Dial +1 929 205 6099 ID 983 4104 3654

Thanks for your continued focus on how we can keep our kids safe and back to school,



Nathan Quesnel
Superintendent
 East Hartford Public Schools